The Problematic of Ambiguity in Contemporary Algerian Poetry in the Light of Modernity "Causes and Manifestations"

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة الغموض في الشعر الجزائري المعاصر في إطار الحداثة والتجريب الشعري. تحلل الكيفية التي يُسهم بها الغموض في تشكيل الإبداع الفني، وتلقي النصوص، وتفسيرها. يرى النقّاد عمومًا أن هذه الظاهرة ترتبط بثلاثة عوامل رئيسية: النص، والشاعر، والخلفية الثقافية والمعرفية للقارئ. تُوضّح الدراسة طبيعة الغموض وأسبابه وأشكاله، مبيّنة أثره في إبراز التجربة الشعرية من خلال نماذج جزائرية معاصرة. وتعتمد منهجين وصفيًا وتحليليًا لدراسة كيفية إسهام الغموض في إثراء وفهم الخطاب الشعري الجزائري الحديث وتعقيده.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الغموض، التجريب، الحداثة، الشعر الجزائري، الإبهام، المعاصرة.

Abstract: This study investigates ambiguity in contemporary Algerian poetry within the framework of modernity and poetic experimentation. It analyzes how ambiguity shapes creative expression, text reception, and interpretation. Critics generally link this phenomenon to three factors: the text, the poet, and the reader's cultural and cognitive background. The research clarifies the nature, causes, and forms of ambiguity, illustrating its influence on poetic experience through modern Algerian examples. It employs descriptive and analytical approaches to examine how ambiguity enriches and complicates the understanding of modern Algerian poetic discourse.

KEYWORDS: Obscurity , experimentation, modernity, Algerian poetry, ambiguity, contemporaneity.

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1. Introduction:

The renewal movements in contemporary Arabic poetry have sparked a wave of changes that influence poetry at both formal and content levels. The statement by Qudamah ibn Ja'far, "Poetry is composed, rhymed speech that conveys meaning," no longer holds significance for many contemporary critics. The concept of poetry has become multifaceted, making it challenging to define precisely. This is reflected in the numerous perspectives and interpretations regarding contemporary poetry in the era of modernity, where it has expanded into diverse dimensions, infused with thought and philosophy, and encompassing various phenomena.

One of the most prominent phenomena characterizing modernist poetry is ambiguity in contemporary Arabic poetry. This arises from Arab poets being affected by Western literary schools that advocate for ambiguity and deep meaning, along with a philosophical approach to poetry. Schools such as surrealism, which highlights enigma, symbolism, and emotional depth, have contributed to the widespread prevalence of this type of poetry in the poetic landscape.

Contemporary Algerian poetry has not remained untouched by the developments that have affected Arabic poetry as a whole. Therefore, Algerian poets are seen alongside modernist poets from the Arab East, such as Adonis, Al-Bayati, and Abdul-Sabur, in embracing the new visionary experience. This refers to young poets who have ventured into this realm and produced exemplary visionary modernist poetry.

Critics have long held varying views on ambiguity, dating back to ancient times. In Arabic literature, there have been two types of poets: those renowned for their complexity and ambiguity, such as Al-Farazdaq, Abu Tammam, and Abu Al-Alaa Al-Maari, and those known for their clarity and simplicity, such as Jarir, Al-Buhturi, and Abu Firas Al-Hamadani. This phenomenon continues to provoke controversy in contemporary times. Some modernist

scholars, including Adonis and Izz Al-Din Ismail, consider these changes a positive development. Conversely, others, such as Abdul-Rahman Al-Qaoud and Jihad Fadel, criticize these new trend.

On this basis, we can raise questions regarding the subject: What are the causes of ambiguity in contemporary Algerian poetry? How does ambiguity manifest in contemporary Algerian poetry?

2. Causes of Ambiguityin Poetry:

The causes of ambiguity lie in three areas, as determined by many contemporary critics: the nature of poetry itself and its contemporary formation, which leans toward profound thought, philosophy, and emotionality; the poet's nature and his exposure to diverse sources, resulting in a blend of different cultures; and the reader, who often no longer pays attention to reading poetry and creative output, impacting their artistic taste and creating a gap between him and the creator.

2.1 The Nature of Modernist Poetry and Artistic Experimentation:

One of the reasons for ambiguity in contemporary poetry is its visionary nature, depending on vision. "Poetry requires vision; it is window to the absolute, a realm untouched by cold rationality. However, poets should avoid excessive complexity and creating vague, incomprehensible imagery. (Jihad, 1984, p. 99)" Poetry is often compared to the world itself, as it interprets and mirrors it, sometimes merging seamlessly: "Poetry exists where the world hesitates, in the silence and reticence of stones, ready to either withdraw inward or be veiled. The true poetic world is one of semi-silence, simultaneously revealed and concealed (Jihad, 1984, p. 124)

This reason is evident in the following text by Abdelali Rezaki, who, through a deviant linguistic style, was able to convey his sense of melancholy and loss. Rezaki states in his poem "Sailing through the Zero Labyrinth" from his collection *Love at Zero Degrees*:

"I revolve... I revolve

In the stirrings of my wretched days... and time

And in the mirrors of silence... and exile

...Alone

...I throw myself

Into the depths of sorrows

Into the vortex of conjecture

Into the icon of wandering"

(Abdelali Rezaki, *Love at Zero Degrees*, p. 27

2.2 The Poet's Culture and Personal Philosophy

The cultural composition of the poet and the immense cognitive and emotional accumulation that contemporary poets possess have contributed to fostering complexity and making it a hallmark of contemporary poetry. Poets now have "a new vision of art and a contemporary philosophy of life. They live their life and art with a keen, tense sensitivity that mirrors the rhythm of the new world around them. Therefore, they integrate the features of all literary genres into their poems, whether old or new. They employ myth, draw inspiration from epic styles, use the movements of drama, narrative techniques, and the complex music of poetry. Moreover, they utilize all human heritage. (Wadi, 2000, p. 88)"

Poetry has become as complicated as life itself, and the poet draws from a broad culture that combines authenticity and modernity, addressing crises and problems with his pen, bearing the burdens of life. "Thus, the new poem has become a living, complex, and composite structure that unites the poet and his world, blends reality with heritage, and embraces the universe in a broad, spacious form that resonates with the era of globalization. (Wadi, 2000, p. 13) "

It is the poet's right to infuse his poem with some ambiguity, as poetry requires this and it is

one of its distinguishing features. Poetry is not prose, "it necessitates vision; it is a window to the absolute and a state that cannot be subjected to cold rationality. However, the poet should not excessively complicate or create vague, incomprehensible imagery. (Wadi, 2000, p. 99) " It is true that the poet tends to create unprecedented worlds in poetic creativity and feels a strong desire to create a completely new language capable of direct expression (Wadi, 2000, p. 100). But to reach the point of obscurity and incomprehensibility means that their poetry turns into cryptic symbols that become impossible to understand. The contemporary poet's ambiguity is nothing more than "a result of a broken, confused vision that has not reached completion, and the poet's inability to transform their mute experience into an allusive poem. (Romani, 2007, p. 7)"

Among the reasons behind this intense ambiguity, on the other hand, is the weakness of some poets and writers and, unfortunately, the poor quality of their poetic and artistic levels. Therefore, some poets resort to complexity that "arises from weak composition and structure, rather than from the intricacy itself. Often, the poetic vision in such poems is somewhat confused, fragmented, and shallow, and this complexity serves as a curtain to cover the poet's shallow and empty vision (Achri Zayed, 2002, p. 25)." Moreover, "there are writers and poets who have nothing to say, so they resort to ambiguity that conceals no artistic or aesthetic value. (Jihad, 1984, p. 23)"

2.3 Artistic Ambiguity and the Reader's Engagement with the Text

In the context of examining the causes of ambiguity in contemporary poetry, responsibility cannot be attributed solely to the reader. Rather, the phenomenon emerges from a dynamic interaction among the text, the poet, and the reader. Some critics suggest that artistic ambiguity may pose challenges for the reader, particularly if they have not been trained in modern interpretive strategies or have not previously encountered complex forms of contemporary poetry. However, this does not imply that the reader is deficient or

incompetent; rather, it reflects the nature of ambiguity as an interactive aesthetic phenomenon that requires specific cognitive and aesthetic competencies for the proper comprehension and contemplation of the text.

It is essential to distinguish between artistic ambiguity and unjustified obscurity:

- **Artistic ambiguity**: A deliberate aesthetic feature that allows a poetic text to encompass multiple layers of meaning and enrich its interpretive horizon, highlighting the poet's linguistic creativity and conceptual vision. This form of ambiguity reflects the poet's skill and depth of insight and constitutes a constructive element in the reception of poetry, even if it demands additional effort from the eader to engage fully with the text.
- **Unjustified obscurity**: Occurs when the poet fails to employ their artistic tools effectively or lacks a coherent vision, producing a text that is excessively opaque or surrealistic, without adding aesthetic or intellectual value.

Modern critical studies, including the work of Ali Ashri Zayed, indicate that the gap between the poet and the reader is not solely the result of deficiency on either side. Rather, it arises from the interaction of textual complexity, the innovation of the poem, and the reader's cultural background and interpretive experience. Contemporary poetry often employs complex techniques and innovative perspectives that may differ from traditional reading patterns. In this context, the reader shares responsibility by being willing to expand their interpretive horizon and engage with new poetic modes.

Furthermore, the literary and cultural critic plays a crucial role in this interaction. Critics can mediate between complex texts and readers, elucidate the poet's intentions, and reduce interpretive gaps. Some scholars emphasize that poetry is not necessarily composed for the general public but may target specific social strata with the requisite cultural and interpretive competencies, highlighting the selective nature of artistic ambiguity and the particularity of

the poetic audience.

Accordingly, artistic ambiguity emerges as a constructive, interactive phenomenon, balancing the poet's vision, the text's complexity, and the reader's readiness, without assigning unilateral blame. It thus allows contemporary poetry to function as a space for creative reflection and cultural engagement.

3. **Manifestations of Ambiguity and Obscurity in Contemporary Algerian Poetry**

3.1 Use of Symbols and Myths:

Ambiguity in contemporary Algerian poetry has manifested several forms and hues, mainly through the use of symbols and myths that deepen the divide between the poet and the reader, intensifying the obscurity of the poetic text, particularly for the general public and those lacking poetic sensibility, artistic taste, and familiarity with foreign literature. Some contemporary Algerian poets did not dismiss this ambiguity; rather, they viewed it as a tool of poetic formation. Poet Omar Azrag[1] asserts:

If you understand me, you will see our blood as bridges,

Mystery is my garden,

And the surface honors them all,

Something passes like this...

Decipher the symbols, you will see my stark clarity (Azrag, p. 110).

The mythical symbol has prominently appeared in contemporary Algerian poetry, where poets used popular myths such as the Arabian Nights, the legend of Sisyphus, and the maritime legend of Sinbad. The latter particularly captivated many poets due to Sinbad's perpetual wandering and eternal exile. Among the Algerian poets who effectively utilized symbols and myths in their poetry is Athmane Loucif, who adeptly combined the Phoenix and Sinbad in a poetic excerpt (Loucif, 1999, pp. 40,41):

Just as the phoenix

Rises from beneath the ashes,

Its fiery embers igniting,

The impassioned Mahdi emerges,

Fervent at heart,

And soars forth,

Sending rays of guidance

Across the hills and valleys.

He was...like Sinbad,

Cutting through the waves

and sweeping away the darkness.

What stands out in the poet's use of the Sinbad and Phoenix myth is his defiant approach. Sinbad is a symbol that, according to some critics, symbolizes "human ambition for freedom and the desire to uncover the mysterious and unknown through adventure and overcoming hardships. (Hachlafe, p. 109)"

We also find another myth, such as the myth of Sisyphus, which some poets have used in their poetry. For example, the poet Allag mentions it in his poem "Awdet Al Tatar (Allag, pp. 61,62)":

Who will move a rock to free

Sisyphus from me

And then raise the minors from me

Who will restore the lances that now pierce my chest

Who will restore the lances that now dig my grave?

Nothing but ruin.

The poet seems to have used the myth in a plea and urgent relief once again, demonstrating the poet's inability to endure the tragic situation that marked the country during that difficult

period. This leads the poet to evoke the myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned to "roll the rock to the top of the mountain, only for it to roll back down again when he reached the summit, forcing him to start again and again for eternity.. It symbolizes the futility of effort in earthly life. (Ali Baydek, 2013, p. 34)"

3.2 Visionary and Immersion in Meaning in Poetry:

Among the manifestations that have appeared in the phenomenon of ambiguity is the deep vision of the poetic text, known as visionary poetry, which leans towards the future and anticipates the absent. This is a hallmark of modern poetry, causing confusion in the mind of the recipient. As a result, in visionary poetry, "the poem does not express a specific and clear content directly, but introduces its poetic content in a suggestive manner that hints at feelings, emotions, and thoughts without defining or naming them. Therefore, the modern poem does not carry a single agreed-upon meaning. (Ashri Zayed, p. 35) "

Contemporary poetry has become a visionary poem that is difficult to comprehend. Thus, in visionary poetry, the poem no longer teems with its presented theme or the manner in which it is expressed, but rather its efficacy lies in the vision it illustrates and the horizons it opens before its reader. Therefore, Adonis says: "The true poet is not concerned with the subject of the poem, but with its presence before him as a poetic form, meaning the form of vision... It is up to the new reader to stop asking the old question: What is the meaning of this poem, and what is its subject? Rather, he should ask the new question: What questions does this poem raise for me, and what horizons does it open? (Adonis, p. 72)"

The trait of exploring the extremes and journeying into the inner realms has contributed to the creation of ambiguity in Algerian poetry. The poet, like the Sufi, is constantly returning to the beginning, not for the sake of repeating the experience, but out of a desire for discovery —discovering the secret of creation and the eternal mystery. Each journey is followed by a return that heralds endless endings and beginnings that never arrive (Fidouh, 2012, p. 154)."

Poet Athmane Loucif says (Al Robai, p. 515):

The lightning flashes, and mirrors cascade

Between my eyes, shimmering and fresh,

O dewdrops of celestial splendor,

O branches of lightning,

O spring of revelation,

My soul thirsts, and my lips blossomed.

The contemplator of this poetic excerpt notices the Sufi terms in the poem, making it seem as though it was written by a Sufi poet narrating the journey of revelation, the stages of manifestation and the quest for the moment of extinction that the Sufi aspires. This is especially apparent in the conclusion of this poem, where the poet wished for annihilation and death in order to enter the wider space of the world of existence. The poet Loucif says (Al Robai, pp. 515,516):

O lightning, take your time, the down of light has cloaked me

Songs have washed my heart clean,

They have immersed me in floods of meaning

Who lifted the night from my eyelids?

Who soothed my tender nerves?

As a result of this spiritual vision, poetry transformed into a journey into infinite space, a voyage towards the secrets of the universe, and a quest for the absolute. Each piece writing has become "an opening to a new space in this obscurity and a capture of what resists presence and emergence from the elusive world (Allag, 2001, p. 5)." Every poem is like "a bird invading the realm of the unknown, or a boat racing ahead of the water to return to the origin. Every poetic work is a journey towards a richer and higher sky (Allag, 2001, p. 5).". The poet Allag says in his poem "Aswar (Allag, 2001, p. 18) ":

Inside me, things have shattered

A willow with broken branches

And a white flower

A butterfly with burnt wings

And a nightingale choked with song

Inside me, things have shattered

Where do I begin to rebuild?

Where do I begin to rebuild?

This passage embodies an advanced stage of psychological breakdown and collapse for the poet, where he symbolizes himself with a broken reed, a withered flower, and a nightingale choked with singing. It illustrates a stage of collapse and is a late stage of his poetic vision regarding his relationship with the city, starting with rejection, followed by expulsion, and culminating in psychological decline and severe alienation. He concludes by questioning how to heal from this severe alienation and psychological collapse. Notably, the poet did not express this alienation directly but rather in a suggestive and symbolic artistic manner that may not be clear to the reader upon first reading the poem.

3.3 Spiritual Philosophy and Deepening of the Poetic Text:

An observer of Yacine Ben Abid's poetry realizes the extent of abstraction practiced by the poet, making the poem appear as "a distinctive and unique linguistic experiment, where words are emptied of their meanings to bear new ones that can only be revealed by referring them to their framework in the Sufi lexicon (Hima, 2007, p. 59)." The poet often employs Sufi terms in their true meanings, non-symbolic sense, as one of the few poets who live the Sufi experience and strive to express and describe it. He is among the Algerian poets closest to Sufism, and his poetry resembles Sufi poetry in immersion, witnessing, and annihilation. Ben Abid describes his spiritual journey in " Al-Wahj Al-'Udhri" as follows (Ben Abid, 1995, pp.

16,17):

Read your book in the beam of my promises

I am a poet who weaves light into my verses

I am departing.. tranquility is in its folds

My purity, my fears, and the ecstasy of my ways

I am departing.. O my star, raise your arm

Embrace the emptiness where I rest

Read the labyrinths of longing with its pulse

Cross its ascetic paths to its summit

And tell life, in its sweetness and clarity

In our meeting on the banks of my streams

This excerpt represents an advanced phase of spiritual exploration and a deep poetic expression for the poet, symbolizing himself as a broken reed, a withered flower, and a nightingale choked with singing, describing a stage of spiritual breakdown and deep personal reflection. It illustrates a late stage of his poetic vision of his situation with the city, beginning with rejection, then expulsion, and ending with psychological collapse and severe alienation. He concludes with questioning how to heal from this severe alienation and psychological collapse.

Through examining this poetic passage, one can notice the words and phrases indicating travel, wandering, ascension, and departure. However, the poet's concept of journey differs from that of the ancient Sufi poet who described an earthly journey from one country to another across vast deserts. Instead, the contemporary poet has transitioned to the vast expanse of the sky with its stars, planets, and galaxies. His portrayal of travel and journey has become broader and more expansive.

Furthermore, the poet often associates the theme of journey with the symbol of femininity,

merging them in a way that suggests a profound connection between travel and women. His journeys are invariably linked with women, as he expresses in this passage:

In your eyes, I melted away

A captive, walking, forever astray

Like a child, I spread my shade

Upon your lips, a journey made

Without an appointment, I gathered myself

Migrating with my love to your embrace

One of the most notable characteristics in Yacine Ben Abid's poetry, as observed in his collection " Al-Wahj Al-'Udhri " and his other poetic works, is the intense presence of women, prompting an inquiry into the nature of these women. Are they sensual beings, or are they the symbolic representation of Sufi women, through whom divine manifestation and cosmic beauty are perceived? Initially, there is a resemblance between Sufism and the poets of love (ghazal) in terms of personal emotional experience, though there is a significant difference between them regarding the beloved.

The tales of Sufis often resemble those of lovers. For example, Qays ibn al-Mulawwah was captivated by Layla, leaving his family and wandering from place to place like a madman. Similarly, Ibrahim ibn Adham loved for the sake of God, abandoning his wealth and roaming with other wanderers.

The poet employed symbolism and allusion to describe his poetic experience, a feature prevalent throughout his collection. Sufi symbolism is prominent, particularly the feminine symbol. They used women as symbols of divine love and cosmic beauty. Their poems were filled with references to Layla, Salma, Saada, Loubna, and the symbol of wine, which constantly appeared in their poems, symbolizing poetic ecstasy and love. The Sufi looked at the world, naming reality Layla and Saada, and admired wine and celebrating it in his verses.

4. Conclusion:

This study has examined the phenomenon of **artistic ambiguity** in contemporary Algerian modernist poetry through selected textual examples. It has maintained a clear conceptual distinction between *artistic ambiguity* and *obscurity*. In this framework, artistic ambiguity is understood as a deliberate aesthetic strategy that produces semantic plurality and interpretive openness while preserving textual coherence. Obscurity, by contrast, denotes excessive semantic opacity that compromises communicative intelligibility. Establishing and sustaining this distinction is essential for analytical precision and critical fairness.

The analysis shows that artistic ambiguity constitutes a defining feature of contemporary Algerian poetic modernism. While this tendency aligns with broader developments in modern Arabic poetry, it also reflects specific Algerian historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts. Artistic ambiguity frequently emerges from symbolic condensation, linguistic deviation, intertextual layering, and the poet's philosophical and experiential orientation. When internally regulated, these features generate productive interpretive depth; when insufficiently structured, they risk sliding into obscurity.

The study further demonstrates that the interpretive distance sometimes observed between poet and reader should be understood as the outcome of a dynamic interaction among textual complexity, authorial vision, and evolving reading practices. It cannot be attributed exclusively to either the reader's limitations or the poet's expressive choices. Rather, it reflects broader transformations in literary production and reception within contemporary culture.

In light of these findings, further research devoted specifically to Algerian poetic corpora is recommended, particularly studies that trace the evolution of artistic ambiguity across

generations of poets. Comparative investigations within the Maghrebi and Arab modernist traditions would also help clarify distinctive local features. At the pedagogical level, incorporating contemporary hermeneutic approaches into Algerian literary curricula may strengthen interpretive competence and enhance engagement with modern poetry. Culturally, supporting critical forums, annotated editions, and translation initiatives would contribute to a more balanced and informed reception of Algerian poetic modernism.

In conclusion, artistic ambiguity in contemporary Algerian poetry should be regarded not as a deficiency but as a structurally grounded aesthetic choice. Its critical evaluation depends on maintaining a rigorous distinction between productive ambiguity and obscurity, and on situating both within their broader literary and cultural frameworks.

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